THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

a century of string music

Gustav Holst A Fugal Concerto

Imogen Holst Suite for String Orchestra

Grażyna Bacewicz Concerto for String Orchestra

Cecilia McDowall Great Hills

Angus Davison Mountain

Christine Draeger, flute

Rachel Tolmie, oboe

Emlyn Lewis–Jones, violin

David Angell, conductor

2.30 pm, Sunday 23 November 2025

St. George's Hall, Newtown

Welcome to a century of string music in one afternoon! The beginning of our century is marked by Gustav Holst's 1923 *Fugal Concerto*, and the end by Angus Davison's *Mountain* from 2023 – although, since Angus added some further subtle enhancements to his already marvellous piece at our rehearsal just a week ago, perhaps that's now a century and a bit.

As well as the span of a century, there are various other "themes" running through our programme. Cecilia McDowall's *Great Hills* has explicit connections with J.S. Bach, while the Grażyna Bacewicz *Concerto* has been described by a commentator as a "modern Brandenburg Concerto". Although Gustav Holst's work has no direct connection with Bach, the use of fugal textures in all three movements hints at baroque inspiration, as does the elegant aria which forms the middle movement. There is also a (rather modern) fugue in the *Suite* of Holst's daughter Imogen. There are British hills and a Tasmanian mountain; there are three women composers; and as already mentioned, two Holsts, father and daughter.

We're sure that our regular audiences will be as delighted as we are to have Christine Draeger and Rachel Tolmie joining us for this concert. This will be their third appearance as duo–soloists with Bourbaki (after works by Phillip Wilcher and Arthur Honegger), and they have played in another eleven Bourbaki concerts individually. As well as a recording each! We are immensely grateful to both for their past and present collaborations with us, and look forward to more in the future.

As usual, we plan to give three Bourbaki Ensemble performances in 2026. Anyone who is not on our email list and would like to join can do so by scanning the QR code. Please join us next year for more music you (probably) haven't heard before!

PROGRAMME

Cecilia McDowall

Great Hills, for solo violin, flute, oboe and string orchestra

I Prelude: Lady Blunt's Stradivarius
II Passacaglia: The still night
III Perpetuum Mobile: Belloc's Mill

Emlyn Lewis–Jones, violin
Christine Draeger, flute; Rachel Tolmie, oboe

Angus Davison

Mountain, for string orchestra and synthesiser

I. Dawn
II. On the Pipeline Track
III. Tarn with Bubbles (and Organ Pipes in the Background)

Imogen Holst

Suite for String Orchestra

I. Prelude
II. Fugue
III. Intermezzo
IV. Jig

INTERVAL — 20 minutes

Gustav Holst

A Fugal Concerto, Op. 40 No. 2

I Moderato
II Adagio
III Allegro

Christine Draeger, flute; Rachel Tolmie, oboe

Grażyna Bacewicz

Concerto for String Orchestra

I Allegro
II Andante
III Vivo

British composer **Cecilia McDowall** (1951–) has earned great acclaim for her choral music both sacred and secular. Notable works include the carol *A Spotless Rose*, commissioned in 2021 by the Choir of King's College, Cambridge for their celebrated annual *Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* on Christmas Eve; and the 2019 *Da Vinci Requiem*, which sets words from the traditional Requiem text alongside the writings of Leonardo da Vinci. Orchestral compositions include *Rain, Steam and Speed*, inspired by the J.M.W. Turner painting of that name; and *Great Hills*, with which this afternoon's concert opens.

Great Hills was premiered in 2007 at the Shipley Arts Festival in Sussex, England. Its inspirations include the nearby South Downs; Shipley's famous resident, writer Hilaire Belloc; and J.S. Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 4*, which was also on the programme at the 2007 performance. The work is written for the same combination of instruments as the Bach: violin, two flutes and strings, though the composer has kindly given her permission for the second flute part to be taken by an oboe today. The opening *Prelude* commemorates Lady Anne Blunt, whose descendants live in Shipley. Granddaughter of Lord Byron, traveller, polyglot and horse breeder, Lady Blunt was also a skilled violinist and the owner of an instrument made by Stradivarius in 1721, at about the time of the Bach concerto. As well as the influence of Brandenburg 4 on the instrumental ensemble, the attentive listener will detect frequent allusions to the third of the Brandenburgs, and occasionally to others besides.

The succeeding *Passacaglia: The still night* is a response to Sussex–born Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem *A Summer Evening Churchyard*. As is traditional, the movement is built upon a repeated figure in the celli and bass. This supports a succession of tranquil but eloquent melodies in the upper strings, generally led by the solo violin, and decorated by ornate flourishes from the wind instruments. Finally, the *Perpetuum Mobile* is a portrayal of Shipley's most famous landmark. The King's Mill, owned at one time by Belloc, is evoked by by rhythmic figuration and somewhat mechanical repeated semiquavers, enlivened by frequent changes of time signature. The development of single notes into clusters and back again suggests the circling sails of the mill, while sparkling melodic fragments are contributed by flute and oboe. A brief silence and a final burst of energy bring the work to a close.

Angus Davison (1993–) graduated with a Bachelor of Music from the Tasmanian Conservatorium and then completed further study at the Sydney Conservatorium. He is now resident in Sydney. Angus's music has been performed by the Melbourne and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras and other leading Australian ensembles and soloists, as well as in Europe, South Africa and the USA. He has won a number of prizes for his compositions, has received scholarships and has participated in prestigious young composer programmes.

Mountain was commissioned by the Hobart Chamber Orchestra and first performed by that ensemble in 2023. We are delighted to give its mainland premiere! The work evokes the passage of a day at kunanyi/Mount Wellington, the majestic eminence which dominates the Tasmanian capital. We begin at (or before) dawn, the silence gradually broken by the calls of birds welcoming the rising sun. The violas initiate a shadowy theme which is gradually taken over by the entire ensemble, unfolding to the blaze of full sunshine. The vigorous activity and excitement of a walk *On the Pipeline Track* give way occasionally to more relaxed episodes. At the end of the movement, the orchestra cuts out abruptly to leave a single synthesiser note, leading into the hushed textures of sunlight glistening on the surface of a mountain tarn. Bubbles rise to the surface in *pizzicato glissandi* for cellos and basses; four solo instruments recall the *Pipeline* theme; a final radiant and exultant burst of birdsong fades into nightfall.

Imogen Holst was born in 1907, the only child of Gustav Holst. She had a string of sparkling successes while still at school (including three years at St. Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith, which had become renowned for its musical achievements under her father's direction), and later at the Royal College of Music, where she studied composition and conducting, and was awarded a scholarship as the "best all–round student". One of her compositions from these years, a *Phantasy String Quartet*, won the Cobbett Prize and was broadcast on the BBC, an extraordinary feat for a student composer. In later years, Imogen frequently and selflessly put other composers' interests before her own. Above all, she was devoted to her father's memory and was determined to promote and maintain public recognition of his genius. She published a biography of Holst, and an analysis and a thematic catalogue of his music. For many years she was an assistant to Benjamin Britten, and in 1956 became joint artistic director of the Aldeburgh Festival, founded by Britten and Peter Pears in 1948. She also held many teaching posts, and was was widely recognised as an inspiring and innovative educator. Imogen died in Aldeburgh in 1984, where her grave now lies a few metres from that of Benjamin Britten.

As related in a note to the CD "Discovering Imogen" (NMC Recordings, 2024), a group of Holsts's friends, concerned about the lack of performances of her works, wrote to her in 1942, offering to organise a professional concert of her compositions in the Wigmore Hall, London. Imogen wrote a number of new pieces for this occasion, one of which was the *Suite for String Orchestra*, and it duly received its premiere in 1943, with Imogen herself conducting the Jacques String Orchestra. Distressingly, the piece then vanished entirely and was not published until 2022; nor (according to the publishers' website) was it performed a second time until 2024. Today will mark only the fourth performance ever of this magnificent work.

The *Suite* begins with a quiet but eloquent *Prelude* whose most notable feature is its flexible meter. The asymmetrical lilt of five–quaver bars predominates, though there are plenty of excursions to different rhythmic groupings. A brief theme is announced by first violins, then taken over by seconds and cellos; before long, a second theme appears deep in the lowest register of cellos and basses. This second theme develops into an extended episode in which violas take the lead. Later on, first violins and violas share a duet while other instruments rest; the movement ends with a static chord anchored by *pizzicato* basses.

There follows a *Fugue*. Possibly prompted by a devotion to baroque music (Imogen's musical interests ranged from the mediæval to the contemporary, and from rural England to West Bengal), the fugue respects the traditional form while admitting not the slightest hint of pastiche. Second violins, violas, firsts and cellos in turn proclaim a sturdy and vigorous theme; even the basses, freed from their customary partnership with the cellos, have their own individual moments of glory. The fugue ends with an eerie chord in harmonics and a final *pizzicato*.

Despite Holst's devotion to her father's music, her own compositions are anything but a pale imitation of his. She was not immune to the example of her contemporaries or her community, – what composer ever is? – but her style is very much her own. If there is an influence on the haunting slow *Intermezzo*, it might be that of Gerald Finzi, with the prominent use of false relation (a “chromatic contradiction” in which notes such as E♮ and E♭ occur simultaneously or in close proximity) and other poignant harmonies. Scored without basses, the movement begins with a gentle violin melody whose motives echo and re–echo in the supporting parts. A slightly faster middle section features violin solos over static accompanying chords, and this magical piece concludes with the plaintive voice of a lone cello.

The *Jig* which forms the last movement of Imogen Holst’s *Suite* employs dance themes of traditional shape and rhythm, but combines them in strikingly original ways, the first four entries appearing in wildly irreconcilable keys. Nevertheless, the effect is not of a dissonant tangle but of a delicate web – a “fairy dance” which in some ways brings to mind Mendelssohn’s music for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. A simple and harmonious folksong provides a contrast, before the jig returns and builds to an emphatic conclusion. We most sincerely hope that this wonderful suite will soon take its deserved place in the repertoire.

In the early 1920s, **Gustav Holst** (1874–1934) expressed the intention of revisiting his “early love of counterpoint”. The fruits of this move were to include the two pieces labelled Op. 40, a *Fugal Overture* and the *Fugal Concerto* for flute, oboe and strings. The concerto, essentially, is what the title says: each of its three short movements is, if not an academic fugue, a work which exploits the basic fugal principles of repetition and variation. The robust subject of the first movement is presented by tutti strings, with answers from oboe and flute; the subject later appears in inversion (upside down), a common fugal technique. The second begins with a lyrical and expressive flute solo which could almost be an aria from a Bach cantata. Each soloist is allotted a cadenza in the brisk and rhythmic finale; the movement eventually makes its way to a dance tune identified by Holst as "If all the world were paper", and a surprising quiet ending.

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909–1969) is generally recognised by Polish musicians as one of their country's leading twentieth–century composers. Also a virtuoso violinist, she spent the war years in Warsaw giving "underground" concerts, the Nazi occupying forces having banned any kind of public gathering. Her *Concerto for String Orchestra*, which won a Polish State Prize in 1950, has been described as a "modern Brandenburg Concerto". The majestic opening of the work is largely based on two figures, a violin theme of generally rising contour, and a descending scale first given to the basses. Both recur frequently throughout the *Allegro*, interspersed with many passages of dashing semiquavers and the occasional quieter interlude.

The central *Andante* begins with a mysterious texture of divided violins, which turns out to be the accompaniment to a sombre cello solo. The cello is joined by two violas, then by two more cellos. The scoring expands to encompass the whole ensemble, with multiple strands rising in parallel to a powerful climax. Further expansive tutti passages, alternating with solos for viola and violin, lead to a brief concluding section in which violas take over the violin textures from the beginning of the movement, while the cello reprises its opening solo.

Bacewicz concludes her *Concerto* with a vivacious dancing finale. Two contrasting episodes, slightly slower, set a chordal theme in the lower instruments against a solo viola or violin: after the second, a whirlwind of driving rhythms, brilliant scales and dramatic accents leads to a thrilling conclusion.

Christine Draeger, flute

Christine Draeger studied flute at the Tasmanian Conservatorium, and with Zdenek Bruderhans at Adelaide University. She was a member of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra 1981–86 and has freelanced with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, the Opera Australia Orchestra and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra. She has made many studio recordings for ABC radio and Fine Music (2MBS) FM, and released three CDs of Australian flute music with `www.fluteworthy.com.au`.

Christine is an associate represented composer at the Australian Music Centre. In 2019 she wrote *Three Dances for Imaginary Animals* for flute and strings, which is dedicated to David Angell and Bourbaki. It was premiered by Christine with Bourbaki in 2019 and then recorded for YouTube.

Christine is a partner, with Lamorna Nightingale and Jocelyn Fazzone, in Fluteworthy Publications, recording, writing, arranging and editing flute music.

Rachel Tolmie, oboe

Rachel started playing the oboe at ten years of age and the cor anglais at twelve. On successful completion of her Fellowship in Music Diploma for Oboe Performance (AMEB), Rachel travelled to England and completed with Distinction a postgraduate diploma at the Royal College of Music, London, specializing in Solo and Chamber Music Performance. Since her return to Australia, Rachel has released eight CDs as a soloist with the Wirripang label, which specialises in Australian music.

Rachel has appeared with several orchestras in NSW as a soloist and is delighted to be returning today to collaborate with the Bourbaki Ensemble once again. Currently, Rachel plays with the Balmain Sinfonia, the Philharmonia Choirs Orchestra and the St. Mary's Cathedral Orchestra in Sydney.

David Angell, conductor

photo: Steve Dimitriadis, www.mestevie.com

As a violist and chorister, David has performed under internationally famous conductors including Sir Charles Mackerras, Stuart Challender and Richard Bonynge. Since taking up conducting in 1998, he has directed a number of musical societies and orchestras, most frequently the Bourbaki Ensemble and Orchestra 143. Highlights have included a Bourbaki concert in the Utzon Room of the Sydney Opera House; and the Orchestra 143 Mozartathon, in which David conducted all the symphonies of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in a series of five concerts spread over a single weekend.

David has been guest conductor for two concerts with the Crendon Chamber Orchestra (Thame, UK), where he presented programmes featuring works by Mahler, Vaughan Williams and Australian composers. Since mid–2023, he has been conducting The Lawyers' Orchestra, leading them in symphonies by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. David has studied conducting with Richard Gill.

David is actively involved in arranging music for strings. The first Bourbaki Ensemble concert of 2022 premiered his arrangement of the accompaniment to Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*, which was heard again in the Sydney Opera House last year; his orchestration of Debussy's *Children's Corner* suite has been performed in Australia and the UK. David's most recent project, a string version of Manuel de Falla's *Quatre Pièces Espagnoles*, was heard in the final Bourbaki concert of 2024.

THE BOURBAKI ENSEMBLE

The Bourbaki Ensemble has been giving concerts in Newtown since 2001. September 2024 saw the Ensemble's Sydney Opera House debut. Besides masterpieces of the string repertoire, programmes include fascinating music by present–day composers. Each concert features at least one Australian composition.

A leading figure in the French military of the nineteenth century, General **Charles Denis Sauter Bourbaki** (1816–1897) was also a precocious musician who composed a flageolet solo *Le chien bleu* in 1823 at the age of just seven years. Towards the end of his life he entrusted a number of unperformed works to the care of his lawyers, instructing that they should be presented at a public concert in 1923, together with *Le chien bleu* and various compositions from the intervening years. After his death, however, Bourbaki's executors refused to credit his serious intent, took no action in the matter, and destroyed all pertinent correspondence.

Violins Emlyn Lewis–Jones, Julia Pokorny, Joanna Buggy, Camille Hanrahan–Tan, Madeleina Hanrahan–Tan, David Loonam, Daniel Morris, Rob Newnham, Chantal Nguyen, Paul Pokorny, Michael Poulton, Warwick Pulley, Victor Wu.

Violas Kathryn Ramsay, Hannah Keese, Rob Nijs, Philip Poulton, Evonne Voukidis.

Violoncellos John Napier, Liesje Croeser plus one, Ying Huang, Ian Macourt, Catherine Willis.

Basses Sasha Cotis, Deniz Emul.

Keyboard Diana Blom.